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## **The Resurrection**

By RUTH SUCKOW

He whom they had always thought of as Mr. Ward, but who all this day had been a shadowy, necessary, scarcely-seen and yet alleviating presence, was at the parlor door.

"I think you may" — he nodded solemnly.

They rose stiffly, the desultory talk they had been keeping up stricken with silence.

After a moment, Clara, who was nearest the door, murmured: "Shall I go first?"

She moved on, keeping hold of her husband's arm, and the others followed.

Little Jean kept close to her father, her big bright eyes very wide open. Helen was near them, hiding with an almost sullen look the pounding of her heart.

Grandpa walked by himself in a kind of stolid bewilderment. His daughters glanced at him anxiously, but did not go to him. He moved ponderously in his square-toed blackened shoes — an old man's shoes. The discomfort that he had always felt on Sundays, when Grandma had made him put on his "other clothes", was intensified, ludicrously and yet

tragically. Now, for a day, he had sat around the house, pitifully out of ease in his solemn best clothes, his big scarred hands idle on his knees.

Was it Grandma who was having all this fuss made for her? That was not like her. No wonder he did not believe it.

The parlor seemed to be motionless in a strange chill air. All its well-known characteristics were curiously heightened — its order, its prim propriety, its smell of Brussels carpet and painted woodwork. Every chair was strangely significant — and the stand, the fern, the bookcase, the center table with the Bible. All seemed new, and at the same time more familiar than ever before.

So the persons standing there felt themselves more than ever as individuals, and far more than ever as a family.

At once they were aware of an alien scent of flowers, breathlessly still. Reluctant, yet moved by a yearning inner necessity, they moved close about and looked upon her.

Here was the very essence of that blended familiarity and strangeness. Her crimped white hair was parted neatly, as always, held by her own shell combs. She wore her black silk dress. But the alien look of hot house flowers upon her plain small person that they had seemed to know so well. And most of all her face —

Little Jean whispered: "Mamma, is it *Grandma?*"

"Yes, dear, of course. Don't you know her?"

The child did not answer. Just so, on autumn mornings, she had looked out to see her whole familiar world transfigured by the silver touch of frost. This was like frost — still, white, and wonderful.

Clara made an uncontrollable murmur.

"I never saw her look so lovely," said Lil.

The sisters — Clara, Lil, and Jennie — drew together. The three sons-in-law made a murmur of assent. Then, after a decorous interval, feeling more terribly out of place than at their weddings in this same room, they stole out, one after another.

Helen, who had come afraid and because they said she must, stood now in awe to find this still beauty where she had expected terror.

Little Jean's wonderment was in the minds of all: Is this Grandma?

Her face, like the things in the room, baffled them with its blending of the known and unknown. The small aged features were hers — more than ever hers. But the look —

"It is not herself," the daughters thought.

"It is Herself," the old man felt.

They had been used to know her as a little, gentle, fluttering-voiced woman, anxiously unobtrusive, trying always with pathetic eagerness, to "do for" them. They had seen her always at work — cooking for them all, mending for Grandpa, mending and sewing for them, then making things for their children, little dresses, underwear, and lastly rows and rows of knitted lace for tiny petticoats. Only a few times, when they were children, they had caught her,

just at dusk, sitting alone by the kitchen window staring out at the grey light behind the apple trees; and had crept away, feeling awed and very lonely. But mostly they had never thought of her as a person in herself. She had been Mother, and then, Grandma.

Now the lonely feeling came back to them, deepened, and with a wondering hurt. The strange inscrutable superiority of death crushed them. They had lost their mother indeed.

Her household look was gone from her; and now, at the moment of supposed extinction, her essential self, forgotten, overlaid, neglected, for years upon years, had taken radiant, calm possession. They were bewildered, filled with an obscure remorse. She, who had been so simply Mother, had she, too, been something other than she seemed? The essential solitude of every human soul came over them with icy breath. And yet she was beautiful! They had the feeling of one who stands upon a high mountain top and sees, with an awe transcending fear, the barren sublimity of space.

Was this Grandma?

After a silent, tearful, concentrated look, that carved that still face forever on their hearts, they touched the little girls and moved away. They could not see her again, they would have gazed forever — but the very poignancy of the moment made it end.

But Grandpa did not move. His lips, covered with a frost of beard, hung apart. There was a pathetic puzzlement, rather than grief, in his eyes. Clara looked at her sisters, moved toward him, then went uncertainly away. He stayed on alone.

He could never have spoken, even to himself, the dim strange things that moved in his clumsy brain. It meant something, he felt. That look was a sign. But he could not make it out. Some of the hurt that his daughters had felt worked at his old heart. But mostly wonderment.

He knew, half unconsciously, this look so strange to all the rest. It was the spirit of her girlhood. It was the look that she had worn to him years ago when he had first loved her. Then too she had seemed beautiful and very far away. Why was it that she wore it now?

And her beauty, her remoteness in her white silence, smote upon him. She had lived their life so long — never her own. He felt a kind of fear to see the spirit that, all these years with him, had underlain the acquiescence, the seeming patience of every day. Mother — Grandma — he struggled for the old familiar feeling. It would not come.

Perhaps it was only her thoughtfulness to look so fair that the children might not be frightened. Or that sense of propriety at which he had often scoffed, to look her very best upon a great occasion. Or that foolish sentiment that women have — to take with her this look as her dearest keepsake.

But most he felt it was a sign. And strange things struggled in him for clearness. It seemed that she might wear this look to show that that religion of hers, which had meant nothing to him, was not so foolish after all — a woman's affair. Broken phrases of it went through his mind — Shall be no sorrow there — All your sorrows shall be forgotten — All shall be bliss — The Resurrection and the Life —

Resurrection — this look of hers — that vague hurt beset him. Why should she look so instead of the familiar way of their life together? The wrinkles, the hollows, the marks of care and toil, were gone, were as if they had not been. Her virgin untouched Self shone supreme. Had their whole life counted for nothing at the final test? He was awed before the great relentless artistry of death, that, putting aside the minute, daily, painful sculpturing of life, had disdained it all and found this one thing fit for immortality.

These things the old man could not say, but they were there.

He was the one human being who had seen just this look of hers before. Something proud and tearful swelled in his dumb old heart. Perhaps he would find her so again. It meant something. Thoughts of a past — long past — flitted through his mind. For a moment he was lifted.

And then he was not sure. He felt, as always, baffled, ill at ease before beauty. He seemed more than ever an intruder, with his big clumsy feet, in this small parlor that had been her own. Her fine clothes, the ceremony, the flowers, bewildered him. He felt old and hurt and doubtful.

What did it mean? Perhaps the others knew. Or perhaps it was not true — no one else had seen.

So when Helen came to the door and said: "Grandpa. Mamma says to come," he turned as an old man turns, and looking at the young girl with puzzled misty eyes, questioned wistfully:

"Your Grandma looks — real nice — Nellie?"

## Glare of Circumstance

By R. L. SERGEL

As the train altered its direction a square of sharp-edged sunlight cut Molly Peter's gray skirt and climbed upward until it rested on the lower half of her face—one of regular features dulled by a porous skin, the face of a woman around thirty-five. The warmth stung her from drowsiness, and with the impetus of one who overcomes inertia she reached for the shade and drew it down. The train was creaking around a long curve to pull ahead over the vast circle of sagebrush, dusty green, with its green blurring into indefinite blue. From the sky, blue and clear as a jewel, the sun poured its white blood, bitterly oppressive. In her aroused position Molly caught sight, through the window ahead, of low buildings, some white, some nondescript, all of them compressed under the wavering heaviness of light.

"Samson, Samson. Change cars for Harvey, Kimberley, and all points east." The brakeman banged the door open and disappeared into the smoker.

Molly stood up to brush her dress, and a yellow mist followed her hands. With her coat over one arm and her suitcase before her she sat down. Across the aisle a Swede was trying to control two boys of three and four while his red-faced wife

nursed a fidgeting baby. All others in the car were sunk low in their seats, a few munching bananas and sandwiches.

A yellow building glided past, and a street of cottages swung on its axis and passed from view; then a grain elevator. With a grind and creaking the train stopped by a station of the same muddy green color as those passed during the morning. Once off the train Molly stood still, looking toward the engine. The conductor and four other men stood by the truck on which black trunks lettered in white were being thrown. Molly stepped back to the train, putting one foot on the bottom step; after a few seconds she withdrew it, walked a few feet toward the truck and stopped again. A streak of dust on her waist brought her hand up in a brushing movement which resulted in a smudge. Biting her lower lip she brushed again, but the smudge was set more firmly. Thus engaged she did not seem to hear the conductor's "All aboard". With the sudden consciousness of the moving train she started toward it, putting her hand out limply against its dull green boards. Limply, as the end of the last coach passed, her hand touched the hot metal of the bars and dropped to her side.

She was left facing the sagebrush, which the horizon held with its round in a great semi-circle closed by a shining line of steel. Afresh she felt in her nostrils the dry pungency of the sage, and as the unchecked power of the sun came upon her in waves she moved to the thin rim of shade by the station. In-



side, the telegraph instruments were clicking sharply: it might have been the crackling of the heat. Farther down the platform the familiar figure of a short heavy man about her own age walked lightly toward a dray, on which he tossed a small bag. Keeping to the narrow path of shade Molly moved toward him. As she came up the man turned to her with the smooth quickness of a cat. His short thick body made it a movement of animal grace and power.

"Better throw your suitcase on here too." Before he had finished speaking he had thrown it on top of the long black trunks, labelled in white, "The Miraculous Duvals". "Take 'em all to the Isis." Duval addressed a man in a straw hat who was climbing on the seat of the dray. "How far down the street did you say it was?"

"Block and a half."

Molly and Duval crossed the drab pad of dust that served for road to the dust powdered strip of hot cement walk. A broad street of gray frame store buildings and two or three brick blocks gave up to their view, at its farther end — some five or six blocks distant — another blurred segment of the green and purple sage through which their train had puffed and jerked for half a day. To the left and right, before the buildings merged, they could see the near limits of the town; beyond that rose again the slopes of the flat basin.

"S'a bit cooler off the train," said Duval, pushing his hat back on his broad forehead and wiping the sweat from his well-formed nose.

"Not enough to matter. This is Samson, ain't it? Say, if you hadn't told me when you come back from the smoker for that deck I'd never've got off here."

"Samson, Idaho. You've got it. Next stop is Kimberley. Bigger place than this, and a better house. We're the whole trick here."

"Usually are on Briscoe time. Never strike a house that'll carry more'n two acts — on Saturday maybe. They do better in Pocatello. Do we strike there again?"

"No, we're booked south."

An electric sign, "Isis," drew them toward it. In the shady recess of the entrance under it a medium sized man with dark pimply features leaned against the ticket window and sucked at a bottle of pop through a straw. Duval put out his hand.

"Are you Farris?"

"That's me. You're Duval? I've been looking for you. Last Briscoe time I booked didn't show up. Best house I'd had in four months. Come on in." Farris turned to the doors as if to lead them in. Molly stood gazing at a display of photographs of Duval and some woman she had never seen. "Nothing on till evening," Farris continued, "matinée no good now — not in July. They can't come in until evening. You might come in and look the little old house over. I've got some dandy new sets for just your sort of stuff. Course we don't run much here, chiefly on week-ends."

"We'll give it the once-over later," Duval answered. "Just now we're looking for some rooms and for the post office. Where'll we find 'em?"

Farris turned from the door. "Well, I'll tell you. There's the Samson Hotel, and White's, and then there's Mrs. Jacoby's, over the bank. Down there on the corner, see? Most of 'em stay there. She's clean and reasonable. The mail won't be out for fifty minutes. When'll you be back?"

"I'll be here soon enough. Don't worry." Duval had taken Molly's arm and was guiding her down the street to the bank.

Mrs. Jacoby answered Duval's knock with the pace of one who goes to meet an expected but not exciting guest. A moment later her fat arm banged open the door of a low-ceilinged room.

"You can have this for a dollar a night." Her weak fat blue eyes rolled to their corners as she looked slantwise at Molly, without the aid of her spectacles, about the size of quarters. "I guess Debby put some water and soap and towels in this morning. I ain't got around to the rooms myself since the last folks 's here."

"But we'll want another," Duval said.

"I thought you were the Mir-ac'lus Duvals?" Again her eyes rolled at Molly, but without altering their vacant expansion.

"That's us, but we want two rooms."

"Humph." Mrs. Jacoby thumped her way down the hall to the next door.

"You can have this for a dollar, too."

Molly stepped into the low room finished in green. Duval, who had followed her, stood in front of the sandy brown dresser.

"This will be all right," she said, and Mrs. Jacoby thumped away. When Molly had hung her jacket over the back of a chair she turned to Duval.

"Well."

"I was just thinking — don't you want to go over some of those acts this afternoon? You were too shaky last night."

"It's too hot, Duval. I'm fagged, and I'm going to stretch out. A rest'll be better than rehearsing that stuff."

Duval crossed to the door, where he hesitated, leaning against the green jamb. His dark brown eyes, black in some lights, rested steadily on her face before they took in her whole form; then, looking down the hall he opened his mouth to speak, but closed it without a word. His short sinuous bulk contracted.

"I'll be over at the shop if you change your mind." With that he left.

Molly caught the meaning of his words only on the last mental echo of them. Her eyes still looked at the blistered green paint of the woodwork against which Duval had leaned his head. She closed the outside door of her room and snapped the catch. Lifting the chair on which she had hung her jacket she tilted it against the door between her room and Duval's. Stealthily she opened it and found that at a certain point the chair fell forward with a sharp report. Then, after washing her face and hands, she lay down.

When she awoke a shaft of sunshine angled a few

inches nearer her cot, and glared from a white patch on the floor which Molly, rubbing her sticky eyes, at last made out as a letter. She saw, too, that the door into the hall was unlatched. Duval must have forced the latch with his powerful hands and tossed in the letter. For a second Molly hoped that he had not seen the tilted chair, but felt sure that he had; that dark head with its quiet eyes must have followed the hand for at least one sweeping look; one look was sufficient.

Sitting on the edge of the cot Molly fingered the letter, one from Charley Hanna. Probably he had bought a new coffee urn for the restaurant, or was thinking of installing a soda-fountain. Her second surmise was right: it was the soda-fountain, a second hand one. And was she coming back soon? He hoped so. All of it written in lead pencil on ruled paper.

Her head was bent and her eyes fixed in staring vacancy on the spot of rag carpet where the letter had been. The dry contraction of a sob shook her, a sob without tears and without relief. If she were back she would be sitting by the electric fan, in a clean dress; maybe she would be mixing sodas. Workingmen would be stalking up to the cash register, with Charley sitting on a stool behind it, a cigar in his mouth. Mexico, what was that to lure him from such a place as the restaurant? A sun-bitten and withered place where money was lost, as Charley had lost his. He had written before that he had bought the place back with money won at cards. The

man had been willing to sell; for no one could make money there except Charley. The word he threw to everyone as he sat on the stool kept them coming.

Molly rose and crossed to the dresser, on which she laid the letter. By the help of the mirror, which seemed to have melted and hardened again, she adjusted her hair and pinned on her hat. Stopping at the door she held it open and set the catch. With a hard twist she forced the latch back. To Duval's hand the door would not have been locked. A glance at the closed door of Duval's room recalled Mrs. Jacoby's mistake. Suppose Duval had said, "Good, we'll take it"?

Molly knew that she would have said nothing, that not even a questioning look would have ruffled her acquiescence. Yet in her own room she had tilted a chair against one door, and, as she had thought, locked the other. The obstruction the lock offered or the report of the tilted chair should have roused her.

But, she wondered as she went down the stairs, would either have roused her to any form of resistance? In the shade of the doorway she paused. The wide parched street was as if cleft apart by the light; the buildings, compressed and shrunk, as if forced back by its impalpable substance. The sign of the Isis, a block distant, hung over the drab sidewalk, its white letters glittering. The heat, however, dry and fine, did not exhaust. The night, Molly knew, would be cool; but the impression and image of the heat, beating through the flawless day, were ineludibly present.

The eyes of a few loafers under the awnings converged upon her as she walked up the street and turned in at the Isis. Once inside the paneled doors she was submerged in a sultry dusk, from which, after her half dozen blind steps, brown walls developed and a narrow block of seats sloping to the stage. There, in a dim light falling from some upper window, she made out the figure of a man sitting on the floor. Half way down the aisle she saw that he was not sitting, but had only the upper part of his body exposed, and was digging, shoveling the dirt into a tub. It was Duval.

"For the love of Mike, what's up?" she asked.

Duval turned a smudged face to smile at her.

"No trap here and no space beneath. Have to dig to set up the levitation apparatus."

"Why don't you let Farris do that? It's his shop."

"Oh, well, it's most done," he answered, clambering out. "You can't expect much in these houses, and you have to give them the full turn too." Duval continued to smile at her as if it were his usual expression.

"Can I help you?"

"You might swing that couch over here." Duval slanted his head at a low-backed tufted sofa, of a frazzled gray cloth in which some red and blue threads still marked a faint pattern. He had just tapped into place a freshly sawed trapdoor in the center of which a two-inch hole was cut. Stepping into the wings he pulled through another hole in the

floor a length of iron cable, which he hooked to a small winch. Molly had pushed the couch over the trapdoor and was adjusting it so that the end of a stout S-shaped bar, protruding from the back of the couch, covered the hole.

"A little to the right," Duval called. "Now we'll try it." Slowly, as he wound the cable on the winch, the snout of an iron rod emerged from the floor. Molly shifted the couch an inch, just enough to allow the rod to engage the end of the S-shaped bar. By a continuous movement a long cross was lifted from the bed of the sofa.

"Good. Mark it, will you?" Duval tossed her a pencil, as he began to unwind the cable. When the iron rod had withdrawn beneath the floor Molly marked heavy circles about the two back legs of the couch, and after pushing it to one side sat down.

Duval, his broad tense back toward her, knelt at a trunk, extracting from it brilliant sundries of metal and cloth. He looked around only once, but with a sober, puzzled face. Whether the look meant only undiscovered apparatus, or something else, Molly did not know. The tilted chair, perhaps.

Not since the first days of their acquaintance had she thought of the possibilities before her; the job had been refuge enough; that it could lead so soon to the necessity of another escape, another refuge, she could not at once face. At first, indeed, she had not expected the freedom she later found herself possessed of. Duval could have had younger women, girls with the tricks of prettiness. Her few weeks in



a chorus before she had met Charley were little enough to get her a place. It had been only a hope, a hope that became a wonder when Duval had selected her, just when the last of her money was going, the last Charley had given her before he left for Mexico. But Duval had paid no attention to her, seldom ate with her, had never said five words to her on the train. Her passivity had been useful, she supposed. Once, anyway, he had confided that young women made him lose control. And that didn't do when balls twirled and knives flashed. But the adjective "young", meaning "pretty", had not deceived her.

Duval stood up. "Did you change your mind about going over those bits?"

"Well — I —"

"Don't know that I feel like it myself now," he interrupted. "It's all right. We'll skip it."

"Just as you say."

Molly left the stage and walked up the aisle. At the back of the house she dropped into a seat and sat watching Duval, who was undoing a cloth roll. Bits of metal caught the light from the upper window and sent it brokenly like cries into the hushed light of the empty house. She sank lower and lower in the seat until her knees pressed against the seat in front of her painfully. Yet she did not move, remaining massive and nerveless. Soon, in a few hours, under the white blaze of the stage, she would be alert and brisk in her spangled dress. Sometime in the course of the hours, or minutes, an unforeseen

impulse would touch her to action; she would step into her usual gestures, all would be as before. But for the moment a huge lassitude was upon her, from which there smokily rose, flickering and brightening, the sight of Charley behind the counter, with a grimace munching his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. Down the room, dressed in white, she was making the carbonate hiss into a soda. Men talked loudly, and the familiar muted metallic clatter of silverware on china beat through her senses as a sea; and as a sea its sound sank to unnoticed levels, for the door of the restaurant had slammed shut behind her, and she stood looking down the avenue, where street cars shrieked on the turn at the corner and jarred across tracks. Charley had gone, the restaurant had been sold; and another woman, fat and pig-eyed, had watched her put on her hat and leave. For the last time the door had closed on that ceaseless clatter. . . . In the agent's gaudy room she sat hopeless. The short smooth man didn't want her, she hadn't had experience enough, only a few weeks in a chorus; and she had two dollars left. Yet in the dim light on the stage the short smooth man was pushing the trunk into the far left corner. So he had taken her, months before—and tonight, as usual, he would throw knives at her, knives bright as silver.

Duval dragged the trunk up stage; as he did so it scraped over a nail with an icy rasp. Molly found herself stumbling through the small dusk lobby, pushing between the swinging doors and blindly into

the white blue day. As she veered from the Isis the open light struck her as a blow. Finding herself headed for the station she turned down a side-street, passing the office of the Samson Gazette and an implement house. After two blocks of houses the town suddenly ceased and she put her feet on the soft pad of road that narrowed up a long slight rise through the sagebrush. The smell of it came to her again in its acrid vigor. The sage rolled on in endless duplication, the endless variety of its bark-brown, contorted limbs tufted with a sad green. Cracks in the yellow ground twisted along like thin shadows of the brush. But even though Molly was ascending a rise, still she was in the central depression of the immense basin with its smooth edges, the horizon unbroken except where, to the northwest, a rim of light blue mountains made a low jag in the intense and purer blue of the sky. But the mountains were bulkless, as if cut from a sheet of blued tin and stuck to the earth on the edge of space. Beyond the horizon lay no possibility of land. Alone the sagebrush basin existed, hung in space, in hot blue space, of blue metal and white sun. And Molly, in the unrelieved downpour of sunlight, shuffled her feet, slid them, noiselessly or with but puffs, over the caramel colored dust of the road. Nothing was ahead, only a stretch of snarling brush, softness of dust, and blue of sky in whose infinite penetrability vision was lost and dizzied. But always as she moved the basin seemed imperceptibly to have followed, centering her perfectly in its circle, making

her steps but treadmill work against its hot, baffling impassivity.

Suddenly, to the right, a lush green, green with water in its heart, held her eyes: an alfalfa field, and on the near side young poplars, along whose weedy feet an irrigation ditch sent its stream, clear and purling. She crossed the ditch on convenient stones and threw herself in rank weeds at the foot of a tree. The poplar gave only a small disc of shade, but it was the first shade of a growing thing Molly had felt in days. The broken stalks of the weeds cut into her back; the poplar, stirred by a new breeze she had not noticed, gave only varying shade, but to her it was real and substantial: as real and almost as soothing as the dark little café with darker stalls she had found in the days after Charley had gone. It had been the only place in all Los Angeles that offered any comfort in that time. This was like it, and she had needed just this, some place apart and cool, where the past could flutter its drab and colored scenes to the low accompaniment of a mood. This she called thinking.

She had needed to think, but the trains jostled, the hotels were temporary, the theatres impossible. Now she could plan, could think her way through to Charley. It was simple, after all. . . . But the sun persisted, creeping under the leaves. It must be four o'clock. There was a train due at four-thirty, one for Salt Lake City. They would leave on that one tomorrow. She hunched along on the ground, but could not go far without getting into

the swift little stream. Move as she would, the blaze was inescapable. Insistent and fine pointed, it had no pause and no ebb, keeping the dry surface of a solid constantly upon her. Then the light broke to rhythm, to a beating of waves, and the light was of knives, thin flashing knives thrown from the white heart of the blue abyss. She put her hat over her face, but through it darted needles of light like pain. And she saw through her frantically closed eyes red suns coalesce, dwindle, turn to silver and blaze. The knives came unremittingly, and she was prostrate, open, exposed in every dark fibre to the noiseless impact of merciless light, of silver knives.

With a cry she splashed through the stream and stood in the road, gasping. Far off the blue shimmer of land threw wavering shadows toward the sun. She looked for relief to the road, and saw that her shoes were caked, and that her skirt was banded with dirt at the hem, dripping balls of water that filmed in the dust. Half a mile distant lay the town, a low cluster of white and gray buildings resting on the hard surface of the basin, the full target of the sun.

A few steps and she had left the alfalfa and trees behind; the stream had disappeared, she did not know where. If she could make the train she could forever leave behind this country and the quiet dark-eyed man who spent his afternoons digging holes in the center of a stage. Charley would be sitting behind the counter, chewing his cigar; it would be just as if she had gone shopping and had come back. If she stayed away Charley would find

another woman, or move, and never scrawl another note. Or her life might be tangled with Duval's — the end of a week might bring that to pass.

Beyond the horizon the train whistled. She could make it if she hurried, for she was in town now, on an empty side street a block from the Isis. Again the train whistled.

Molly and the train reached the corner of the station platform at the same time. A couple of traveling men and a woman yanking a small child came down the platform; the first trunk slammed on the baggage truck. Molly felt in her handbag for her purse. Shaky fingers touched a five dollar bill, a silver dollar, and twenty-seven cents — enough to reach Salt Lake. Once there — once there she was jobless, with Los Angeles a thousand miles away. A hot wind fanned against her. There would be streets, and no trees, no dark restaurant; she would be lost among the people in the lonely glare of the sun. . . .

“All aboard.”

Molly stepped to the side of the car. Duval was in the theatre, probably, listening quietly to Farris. Her hand, resting on the car, felt it start, and she heard the brilliant clangor of the bell and the chug of the engine. Her fingers passed over the boards of the car as over a picket fence, at last hitting the iron bars of the rear platform, which left an instant's heat. Again she faced the unaltered sagebrush.

Back in her room she lay down again to a tossing sultry nap, from which she awoke with feverish eye-

balls and with the subtle venoms of unrestful sleep running in her blood. A sound of splashing came through the door to Duval's room as if no door were there.

They met in the hall.

"Been here since you left?" he asked as they descended the stairs.

"Took a walk before I came back."

"A walk! Damn poor day for that, I'd say."

"Oh, I don't know. Where's the best place to eat?"

"There's only one, Farris tells me. A chink joint across from the Isis."

At supper Molly divided her time between her plate and Duval, who ate without a word, watching with quick eyes all who came in. His jaws worked smoothly, never crackling occasionally as did Charley's. When they had finished Duval pulled out his big silver watch.

"It's later than I thought," he announced. "We'd better get over, I guess. I want to see Farris about working the crank tonight."

In the little dressing room, a sort of lean-to off the back of the stage, Molly threw up the sash of a small window and leaned against the sill. A scrubby clearing, half the barnyard of a livery stable, served as rusty foreground to the next street, down which a wagon rumbled. Beyond lay the sagebrush, its green and blue sobered now, and darkening into no color at all. At one side the straight road of the afternoon dimmed as she watched, melting into the mass of the land. Soon, only a part of the night, it

would lie empty for hours under the cool wind that had come up; a wind that scurried in at the window, touching her hot face, and making her chest contract in almost a shiver. She turned from the window, groped for the bulb, found it, and snapped on the light. Deliberately she put on the short red dress and the red fibre stockings. Even more thoughtfully she made up, trying the effect of not quite so much rouge as usual, with an eye rather to her image in the mirror than to her appearance on the stage. Several minutes she spent in a delicate addition and subtraction, finally smiling faintly at her reflection as she sank back in the chair.

On the stage some one was talking, and she recognized the even low tones and quick lift of Duval's voice. Above the din of the piano, or through the din, seeped the mutter of the audience, like the coarse breathing of some great animal. Presently its impalpable resistless arms would grasp her, to toy with her brightly, to let her go for a day, again to catch and hold. But the remaining moments were hers, always given and seldom used. She drew from her bag some tatting, but after two or three passes let it fall to her lap. After sitting for some time with a mind empty of image and pulpy, she turned out the light and left the room.

Passing along the dark corridor formed by the back drop and the stage wall she turned to find Duval making the last adjustments on the stage. He looked occasionally at the reversed flicker of picture on the screen, in the dim light of which he moved from table to tray. Gradually Molly became



conscious of some one standing in the shadow. When her eyes had taken in more light the shape of Farris emerged from the obscurity and she spoke to him.

"Got a good house, haven't you?"

"Fine, fine. It's a peach. Best in months. Say, you ought to go good."

Molly stood silent a moment, and had just started to reply when Duval came up, his even teeth gleaming in a smile directed partly to Farris, partly to her.

"Now, Mr. Farris, I'll show you about the levitation act. It's very simple. I guess we've got time." He cast a glance over his shoulder at the screen.

"Sure, more'n half a reel yet."

"Now, you see, when I nod my head this way you begin to turn the crank. Slow, do you see, but steady. And don't stop till I raise my arms like this. By that time she's up."

The demonstration followed the instructions.

"Then, when I let my hands fall this way, you begin to unwind. But go slow all the time. There, do you see?"

Molly, after a peep at the house, had sat down in front of the drop. The lovers on the screen had just been left alone, the tall dark man, registering contempt, scorn, and frustration, having stalked from the room. It was much like the room in the hotel at Twin Falls. At first Duval might take her to such pleasant cool rooms, — but in a few weeks the dusty noisy round of barren rooms and trains. And that

— for how long a time she did not force herself to speculate. Long enough, however, to let Charley move on, to go back to Mexico. The picture lovers were setting themselves for the inevitable embrace; a close-up brought instantly near their grotesquely enlarged heads, trembling toward each other with a slow accuracy.

The film whipped from the screen to leave a glowing square, white, exact, and empty. Suddenly transported by this, which held the associative power of a familiar smell, she saw the long city street down which she trudged to no particular place, the restaurant door having been closed behind her. She rose convulsively and walked to the wings. Duval met her with a full smile and a glance that swept her from head to foot.

Faris had run up the screen and stood ready at the curtain ropes, having switched on the flood of lights.

"We're off," said Duval, rubbing his supple hands together as he always did just before they went on.

Then Molly found herself bowing to an explosive house. Already Duval was talking rapidly, rolling up his sleeves at the same time. Molly began her work of handing rings and balls to him, or arranging trays, and pushing used apparatus aside. Balls whirled in the air, dozens, hundreds of them. Steel rings clinked and melted into one another. Paper whizzed from cornucopias in endless streams and confusion. Shortly the adventurous small boy was extracted from his fellows, and eggs and coins slipped from his pockets. Then Duval, with his

mocking patter, went among the audience, where cards changed their spots and were recovered from shuffled decks.

While Duval was busy in the house Molly straightened a table that had been pushed just enough to expose partially a service tray. That done nothing remained but to chat with Farris, who stood in the wings watching her movements.

"That's a good act you've got. They like that stuff, just lap it up," he confided. His lips seemed fleshless muscle.

Molly's eyes brightened. "They sure do. And Duval's got a good line, don't you think?"

Farris pushed out his flabby lips meditatively. "Yes," he said, "pretty fair; but not so good as the last fellow I had though. Hiram Hedges. Know him?"

"Sure, he was on at Pocatello with us. Didn't care for it much myself. Why, we got a hand that made his sound sick."

With that she crossed to the other side, casting a look at Duval, who was pacing the uncarpeted aisles, striking a laugh here and there, then a roar. When he turned back to the stage the hand that Molly touched to her hair shook a little. That time in the act was near when she, and not Duval, focussed that slope of eyes. She took her place behind one of the tables covered with red velvet.

From the center of the stage Duval spoke in low clear tones to a quieted house. "An act which has mystified and confounded the greatest scientific

minds of the time —” Then he led her — a bit grandiosely — to the couch. When she had lain down he adjusted the folds of her dress so that in dropping they would cover all trace of the support, and retired behind the couch, still bowing and smiling. The girl at the piano was playing softly. Duval’s face became sober as his hands waved regular paths over her. At first the crank squeaked a little and Duval frowned, but the lifting continued smoothly and she knew that the rod, hidden by Duval’s sturdy leg, was creeping up and up until it should engage the bar. A push, a start, and she was lifted an inch. The house grew quieter. Up and up — she must not move. Duval was passing hoops over her, back and forth, back and forth. Then she was going down; gradually she settled on the couch and the support stopped cutting her back. The applause rose in a wave, and she, Duval holding her hand, was bowing to it.

Again Duval had stepped to the front of the stage. “We now come, ladies and gentlemen, to the last exhibition of all. This is an act that I have performed for years, and not only in America —”

While Duval talked Molly was arranging the background of planks so that its scarred surface angled toward the audience. Next, Duval had taken her hand and was placing her against the background, elevating her arms, stepping off a yard to look at her posture critically, returning to move a stiffened arm half an inch, all the while with tiny glints dancing on the dark curves of his eyes.

He had drawn off and was holding up for the inspection of the audience one of the heavy gleaming knives. He faced her and the board; the knife slanted and flashed in his hand. She closed her eyes. Thud! Through a snaky veil of fire indefinitely before her shone pale blue lights. Only effort could open her eyes; and she saw knife following knife, given off from a dark blot against the wings, a black sun from which flashed silver lightnings. She must run, but she could not move. She lived in a rhythm of clearing and dwindling masses, alternating between a white chaos and the stage of the Isis. She caught Duval's face, drawn, intent, and blackening. He was to throw another. Thud! Another. . . . Alone in a white heaven, englobed in light, knives beating on her from every side, constantly, pitilessly. She must not move, not her head. She could not.

Then the great blaze in which she was swung paled and shook, and suddenly broke to objects. She was on the floor, gazing at the rolled drops and rigging, and somewhere between her and the ceiling floated Duval's enlarged face, blanched and smooth. He was trying to speak through a din of screaming, trying ineffectually, not attempting to make her hear, just talking. The face and ceiling dissolved, and far overhead was only a tumult of lights, then crashing wheels of darkness.

Duval, down on his knees, lifted slow eyes from the work of the knife to watch the curtain as it hitched toward the floor.

## Editorial

Day-long drives by wagon, over twenty or thirty miles of log-roads and winding trails that lead, sometimes, to graded highways and gravelled pikes: these are adventures both physical and spiritual. We rise at what in other days would have been an unearthly and impossible hour. First we feed and harness the team, then enjoy a leisurely breakfast by fire- and lamp-light, while the horses are eating. We are off before the first color of dawn appears. A thin, wispy moon hangs above the gray rampart of cloud that walls the east. The wagon rattles loudly down the long curves of the log-road. In a few minutes we sense a strange pervasion of light; the east brightens fast to pale yellow, orange, red where gray clouds break. Incredibly swift is the dawn, a tonic, heartening event, forcefully suggestive of obscure significance. In an hour the day has come. Then the pageant of life, of form and color: grouse, hares, nesting warblers; the warm brown of the cranberry marsh; cedars; a hillside of giant trilliums; plowed soil or waving grain; sleek, half-wild cattle with bells that clang or tinkle across the hollows; little gray houses, the greetings of neighbors; rushing streams, speckled trout darting in the stainless waters where men and horses drink; at last the dwindling fires of sunset, stars and the night-mystery of the wilderness, lights of home.

The first such drives were never-to-be-forgotten events in the editor's life. On his first long trip he encountered a brush fire, while solving the riddle of the branching, winding roads across a stretch of jack-pine plains, and drove for a mile through the wake of the fire. Stumps still burning glowed redly through the gray haze of pungent leaf-smoke, now acrid and choking, now intoxicatingly sweet like a rare and delicate incense.

The second journey was epically funny, as the editor sees it now: he had bought a cow — a morose, ungainly, black creature with a crumpled horn — at an incredible distance from his home; and the associate editor who is his senior in pioneering had undertaken to pilot the cow and her owner across some miles of wild country, trackless to unpractised eyes. Night found us midway of the plains; the cow decided that the hour of rest had come, and held to her decision with bovine stolidity. Towing proved ineffectual. The editor was reduced to the expedient of walking behind with an admonitory sapling, while his horses circled the stumps in the wake of the associate's buggy. Thus the procession traversed the last four miles of pitch-dark trail. The associate's cheerfulness, and his horse's memory of the road, were our salvation.

The third drive, of some thirty miles on a bright October day, was shared by the editor's wife and little son. The last quarter of the way was after sundown, through interminable avenues of pines, with stars for light on the dim gray trail. An old

mowing machine banged and chuckled behind the wagon, which was piled with miscellaneous prizes from that most interesting of market-places, a country auction. While the horses rested, an hour from home, food and the sweet air refreshed us.

Strangely, or perhaps not strangely, fortitude comes from the silence. Happiness grows like a strong plant in the presence of the beauty of the wilderness. The day's adventuring yields goods not to be hauled in wagons.

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### **Contributors to This Issue**

RUTH SUCKOW's stories, "Uprooted" and "Retired", have appeared in earlier issues of the current volume of THE MIDLAND.

R. L. SERGEL has been an associate editor of THE MIDLAND from its foundation and has contributed both prose and poetry to the magazine. He was graduated by the State University of Iowa and taught for a time in the English department of that institution. He is now in charge of the work in English at the Moorhead, Minnesota, State Normal School.



